

Message Text

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12

ACTION NEA-10

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AID-05 XMB-04 TRSE-00 OPIC-06 OMB-01 /053 W

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R 230641Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO USDOC WASHDC

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5957

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

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USDOC FOR CAGNE OIM/SAD WANDA ALE

ATHENS FOR RTDO

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: BEXP, SY

SUBJ: MARYLAND IOGA TRADE MISSION: SYRIA WRAP-UP

1. SUMMARY: MISSION WARMLY RECEIVED BY SARG AND GOT OVERVIEW OF MARKET POSSIBILITIES IN HOSPITAL, TOURISM, HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION SECTORS. BUT WAR RISK AND LACK OF USG PROTECTION FOR INVESTMENT MAY INHIBIT EXPLOITATION OF COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL. END SUMMARY.

2. MISSION DEPARTED DAMASCUS FOR JIDDA LATE MONDAY NIGHT, JANUARY 19, AFTER FOUR FULL DAYS OF APPOINTMENTS. SARG EXTENDED WARM WELCOME AND FULLY COOPERATED WITH VISIT. OFFICIAL SYRIAN ARAB NEWS AGENCY (SANA) REPORTED MISSION'S ARRIVAL, A GESTURE INFREQUENTLY ACCORDED VISITING AMERICAN GROUPS. MISSION TALKED WITH MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND FOREIGN TRADE DR. MOHAMED AL-IMADI, MINISTER OF SUPPLY AND INTERNAL TRADE AHMAD KABLAN, AND MINISTER OF HEALTH DR. MADANI KHIYAMI.

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SARG APPOINTED HIGH-LEVEL INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE,

UNDER DEPUTY MINISTER OF STATE FOR PLANNING AFFAIRS
ISSAM HELOU, TO BRIEF MISSION ON SYRIA'S PLANS FOR
HOSPITAL AND HOUSING CONSTRUCTION AND MEDICAL EQUIPMENT
PURCHASING. COMMITTEE MEMBERS INCLUDED:
DR. ASSAD ISTWANI, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, MINISTRY OF
HEALTH; DR. ABDALLAH ISSA, CHIEF OF BUILDING AND
PLANNING COMMITTEE, MINISTRY OF HEALTH; MR. DEEB
ARMOUSH, CHIEF OF PLANNING BOARD, MINISTRY OF HEALTH;
MR. ZUHAIR JUWAYJATTI, DIRECTOR OF SERVICES PLANNING,
MINISTRY OF PLANNING; ENG. RAGHEB ASWAD, DEPUTY MINISTER
FOR BUILDING AFFAIRS, MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS;
ENG. HISHAM SATI, DIRECTOR GENERAL, DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR
HOUSING; MR. OMAR FARUK ASWAD, DIRECTOR GENERAL,
GENERAL COMPANY FOR BUILDING; MRS. NAJAH RIFAI,
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, MINISTRY OF HIGH EDUCATION.
OVER 75 HIGH SARG OFFICIALS, DOCTORS AND PRIVATE SECTOR
BUSINESSMEN TURNED OUT FOR AMBASSADOR'S JANUARY 17
RECEPTION FOR THE MISSION. LAST ITEM ON MISSION AGENDA
WAS EXTENSIVE TOUR OF SYRIA'S LARGEST AND BEST-EQUIPPED
HOSPITAL.

3. ALTHOUGH MISSION RECEIVED EXCELLENT OVERVIEW OF
SYRIAN DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND ECONOMIC POTENTIAL AND
WAS FAVORABLY IMPRESSED BY SARG'S WELCOME, IMMEDIATE
AND CONCRETE RESULTS OF VISIT WERE FEW. NO CONTRACTS
WERE SIGNED. NO SYRIAN AGENTS WERE ENGAGED, ALTHOUGH
SOME MISSION MEMBERS SAID THEY WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH
SYRIAN BUSINESSMEN THEY MET DURING THE VISIT. AFTER
A USEFUL MEETING WITH COMMERCIAL BANK OF SYRIA (CBS)
OFFICERS, MARYLAND NATIONAL BANK OFFICIAL DECIDED TO
OPEN CORRESPONDENT RELATIONSHIP WITH CBS; A MARYLAND
NATIONAL BANK OFFICER WILL COME TO DAMASCUS IN A FEW
WEEKS TO FOLLOW UP. OTHER MISSION MEMBERS WERE INTERESTED
IN TOURISM, HOUSING AND HOTEL CONSTRUCTION AND IN
PLANNED 600-BED UNIVERSITY TEACHING HOSPITAL (DAMASCUS
340).

4. GIVEN MISSION THEME OF HOSPITAL DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION,
AND EQUIPMENT, EMBASSY WAS SURPRISED THAT MOST OF THE
MEMBERS WERE LITTLE INTERESTED IN HOSPITALS AS SUCH.
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NOTABLE EXCEPTION WAS GORDON FRIESEN (GORDON A. FRIESEN
INTERNATIONAL, HEALTH CARE CONSULTANTS), WHOSE NEAR-
MESSIANIC ADVOCATION OF NEW CONCEPTS OF HOSPITAL DESIGN
RAISED MIXED REACTIONS IN HIS SARG HOSTS, WHO APPRECIATED
HIS IDEAS BUT ARE UNDER SEVERE BUDGET RESTRAINTS. LAST
MINUTE WITHDRAWAL OF SKILLMAN (SKILL SURGICAL, INC)
MEANT LOSS OF ONLY MISSION MEMBER IN MEDICAL SUPPLIES
AND EQUIPMENT LINES; SEVERAL SYRIAN DOCTORS AND

IMPORTERS EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT AT SKILLMAN'S
ABSENCE. MEDICAL EQUIPMENT SUPPLIER PROBABLY COULD
HAVE TAKEN SEVERAL ORDERS DURING MISSION VISIT.
RUMP MISSION WAS IMBALANCED WITH CONTRACTORS, LEAVING
ONLY FRIESEN AS HOSPITAL/MEDICAL SPECIALIST.

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5. MISSION MEMBERS EXPRESSED WARINESS IN INVESTING
IN SYRIA AT PRESENT TIME GIVEN THEIR FEAR OF WAR IN NEAR
FUTURE; THESE FEARS WERE EXACERBATED BY WORSENING
CIVIL CRISIS IN LEBANON NEXT DOOR. CONTRACTORS
ESPECIALLY RELUCTANT TO INVEST MEN AND EQUIPMENT
FOR 2-3 YEAR PERIODS IN SYRIA WITHOUT MORE USG
SUPPORT. EX-IM BANK AND OPIC (BECAUSE OF LACK OF
BILATERAL AGREEMENT) DO NOT AT PRESENT AID US FIRMS
DOING BUSINESS IN SYRIA; USAID DOES NOT CONTEMPLATE
AT THIS TIME FINANCING HOSPITAL PROJECTS IN THE COUNTRY.
MISSION MEMBERS AND SYRIANS FULLY RECOGNIZED THAT
LACK OF SUCH USG SUPPORT (OTHER THAN EMBASSYINTENSIVE
COMMERCIAL EFFORTS) FOR THEIR ENTERPRISE IN SYRIA
PUTS THEM AT DISTINCT AND PROVEN COMPETITIVE DISADVANTAGE
WITH WESTERN EUROPEAN AND JAPANESE FIRMS.
SEVERAL MISSION MEMBERS OBSERVED THAT CURRENT US
POLICY LIMITS USG ABILITY TO SUPPORT (E.G. FINANCING,
INSURANCE) AMERICAN BUSINESS OPERATING IN ARAB STATES SUCH AS

SYRIA WHICH REQUIRE ISRAEL BOYCOTT LANGUAGE IN TRADE DOCUMENTS. THEY OBSERVED THAT SUCH A POLICY IN MANY INSTANCES INCREASED INVESTMENT RISKS TO A PROHIBITIVE LEVEL.

6. MISSION'S WARM OFFICIAL RECEPTION AND HIGH-LEVEL
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SARG REPRESENTATION UNDERLINE GOVERNMENT'S INTEREST IN PROMOTING US INVOLVEMENT IN KEY SECTORS OF SYRIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (AGRICULTURE, PETROLEUM, HOSPITALS, HOUSING, TOURISM). PRESENT SARG ENTHUSIASM FOR SUCH TRADE MISSIONS MAY QUICKLY WANE, HOWEVER, IF THEY DO NOT PRODUCE TANGIBLE RESULTS. THE FAILURE OF MEMBERS OF SUCH MISSIONS TO FOLLOW UP THEIR VISITS WITH WILLINGNESS TO SELL AND/OR INVEST IN SYRIA MAY UNDO THE GOOD OF THEIR VISITS TO SYRIA. WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND SUCH MISSIONS BE MORE CAREFULLY CHOSEN AS TO MEMBERSHIP AND THEME, EMPHASIZING LOW-RISK SALES OF EQUIPMENT AND SERVICES, RATHER THAN LONG-TERM CAPITAL PROJECTS AND INVESTMENTS. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF THESE MISSIONS IN ABETTING US COMMERCIAL/POLITICAL POSTURE IN THE MIDDLE EAST WOULD BE A USEFUL TOPIC FOR ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL OFFICERS CONFERENCE IN TUNIS MARCH 29 - APRIL 1.

7. ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDA: MISSION WAS WELL ADVANCED BY FSO-RET. JOHN GATCH. LATE ARRIVAL OF MOST OF MISSION PRINTED BROCHURES FORCED EMBASSY TO SPEND MUCH TIME PHOTOCOPYING BROCHURE TO INSURE ITS FULL DISTRIBUTION BEFORE MISSION'S ARRIVAL; EMBASSY HOPES FUTURE MISSIONS WILL SEND THEIR DOCUMENTATION TO US 4-5 WEEKS BEFORE MISSION'S ARRIVAL DATE. ONE MISSION MEMBER NOTIFIED US OF HIS NEED FOR A SLIDE PROJECTOR THE EVENING BEFORE AN EARLY MORNING PRESENTATION. WE CAME UP WITH A MACHINE BUT DID NOT HAVE TIME TO PROPERLY TEST IT; INDIFFERENT WORKING OF PROJECTOR COMPROMISED EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESENTATION. WE STRONGLY URGE THAT FUTURE MISSIONS BRING THEIR OWN ANCILLARY EQUIPMENT OR AT LEAST LET US KNOW OF THEIR EQUIPMENT NEEDS 4-5 WEEKS IN ADVANCE.
MURPHY

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